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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 000405

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IT](#)

SUBJECT: ITALY: PRODI WINS CRITICAL SENATE CONFIDENCE VOTE

REF: A. ROME 0385

[¶](#)B. ROME 0375

[¶](#)C. ROME 0362

[¶](#)D. ROME 0356

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Classified By: Political Minister Counselor David D. Pearce for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[¶](#)1. (C/NF) Italian PM Romano Prodi won a key confidence vote in the Italian Senate on February 28 in a close 162-157 vote. Excluding the votes of non-elected Senators for Life (SFL), Prodi still carried a "political majority" by a vote of 158-157. Prodi will appear March 1 before the Chamber of Deputies with a positive vote of confidence expected there on March 2. However, most analysts see these votes as a potentially pyrrhic victories for a coalition united mostly by its opposition to former PM Silvio Berlusconi. END SUMMARY.

PRODI WINS CONFIDENCE VOTE WITH POLITICAL MAJORITY

[¶](#)2. (SBU) Italian PM Romano Prodi won a key confidence vote in the Italian Senate on February 28 on a close 162-157 vote. Excluding the votes of non-elected Senators for Life (SFL), Prodi still carried a "political majority" by a vote of 158-157. Center-right (CR) politicians have consistently said Prodi's government should be "auto sufficient," that is, sustainable without the votes of the seven SFL, and Prodi squeaked by that higher hurdle.

COUNTING SENATORS: EVERY WHICH WAY BUT LOOSE

[¶](#)3. (SBU) The February 27 vote included few surprises, but the process forced wavering senators to formally declare their disposition toward the government.

-Former Italian of Values (IdV) Senator and President of the Defense Committee Sergio De Gregorio voted against the government, officially placing himself in the opposition.

-Former Union of Christian Democrats of the Center (UDC)

Party Secretary Marco Follini, who had previously announced the switch to great fanfare, replaced De Gregorio's political vote.

-The two dissident Senators from the radical left who upset the majority over the government's foreign affairs policy returned back into the fold, but one of them, Franco Turigliatto, announced he would vote against Afghan mission funding, pension reform and the high speed rail project when/if the legislation comes to the Senate.

-The mostly-independent senator elected from Buenos Aires, Luigi Pallaro, voted for Prodi but said he will vote against DICO legislation, civil unions including those between homosexual couples.

-SFL Giulio Andreotti absented himself from the vote after having originally voted in favor of the Prodi government on May 17. Andreotti, closely associated with the Vatican, said the government's support for DICO motivated his partial change of heart.

-The unpredictable SFL Francesco Cossiga voted against Prodi, having supported him on May 17.

-SFL Sergio Pininfarina was absent.

-IdV Senator Franca Rame announced she would resign after having reluctantly voted for Prodi, in order to keep Berlusconi from coming back.

NEXT STEP, THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES

¶4. (SBU) Prodi will appear March 1 before the Chamber of Deputies with a vote of confidence expected March 2. Given

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Prodi's solid majority in the Chamber, there is little doubt he will win that vote.

WHERE THE POLITICAL WATERS ARE FLOWING

¶5. (SBU) Prodi's victory with a "political majority" blunts the CR argument that his Senate majority is politically illegitimate, but the CR has promptly called the majority "unnatural" given Follini's jump from the right to the left. Prodi released legislators from coalition discipline on DICO, reaffirmed support for Afghan mission funding and said he would push for broad consensus on electoral reform.

Electoral reform has emerged as a priority from the near governing crisis, but the CR has already shown it is looking beyond Prodi by stating it will wait for a technical government to cooperate on electoral reform. Prodi's diverse majority probably cannot pass electoral reform on its own.

COMMENT

¶6. (C/NF) Prodi won his vote, but nobody expects this government to last for too long given its divisions and demonstrated weakness. At the same time, nobody seems to have a good idea exactly what will bring it down or when, though Afghan mission funding and pension reform will be early tests, and administrative elections in late May will be a fair, if imperfect, barometer of public opinion (if Prodi is still in place). The anti-Berlusconi glue still has a strong hold on the left, and that appears to be the main factor holding the coalition together. However, when Prodi does eventually stumble, analysts seem to agree that the next step will be a technical government with an interim and limited mandate lasting about one year. The fact that the next step might not be a return to Berlusconi could weaken that anti-Berlusconi glue. END COMMENT.

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